DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 299 649 CS 506 442

AUTHOR Emery, Winston G.
TITLE A Canadian Perspective on the Teaching of Media in English Language Arts.
PUB DATE Nov 87
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English (77th, Los Angeles, CA, November 20-25, 1987).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Reports - General (140)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Curriculum Development; Educational Assessment; Educational Media; Foreign Countries; *Language Arts; *Mass Media; Secondary Education
IDENTIFIERS Canada; *Media Education; *Media Literacy

ABSTRACT

In Canada during the past 20 years ministries of education have moved to make media study and production a mandatory component of the secondary school curriculum. Media study is evolving through three phases: from an audio-visual aids phase which was a general secondary school phenomena, through media literacy and language arts phases which have come gradually to be identified with instruction in English. Since most programs were developed in the early 1980s and since some are still underdeveloped, it is too soon to tell what impact the official commitments have had on classroom practice. It is apparent thus far that relatively little teaching of media goes on in most English language arts classroom; however, the thrust of new curricula to bring to the attention of the English classroom teacher the importance of media study and production to the development of literate young adults is encouraging. Given the view of language arts emerging in Canada, there is reason for optimism for the future of teaching media in the schools. (One table of data is included.) (RAE)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED299649

# A Canadian Perspective on the Teaching of Media in English Language Arts

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Winston Emery

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

(Paper presented at the annual conference of the National Council of Teachers of English, Los Angeles, California, November, 1987)

By: Winston G. Emery
Faculty of Education,
McGill University

CS 501, 642

A Canadian Perspective on the

Teaching of Media in English Language Arts

It is characteristic of those of us who are actively involved in promoting the teaching of media in Canadian schools to feel we are a small minority. This insight came to me while I was talking to a colleague in another province in preparation for the presentation. He had been telling me of some interesting and exciting work going on at a Secondary School when I asked him if he would speculate on how typical he thought this kind of interest and activity in most language arts classrooms across the province. (The English or language arts classroom is the place where most media study and production is undertaken--in Canadian Secondary Schools.) There was a rather long pause; -- then he said "I wouldn't want to say because I may be presuming too much about English teachers in the schools who may indeed be doing interesting work." Nonetheless, the impression I received from the pause, from some of his earlier remarks that .. "there are in his home province many attempts but idiosyncratic in nature"..., and from his careful reluctance to criticise colleagues, that in the typical secondary English classroom of his province there is relatively little being done in the way of media study and production. Were it that my colleague had asked me that same question about my home province, I would have responded in a similar fashion. In fact, judging from the conversations I've had with colleagues from across the country, the phenomenon I've described is a national one.

The preceding anecdote serves to set a context for the perspective I plan to give you. In Canada we have made some progress in establishing, at an official level, the importance of media study and production in secondary education. In the past 20 years ministries of education have moved to make media study and production a mandatory component of secondary school curriculum. However, there is considerable work to be done in bringing the agenda to the attention of the majority of classroom teachers.

- We need to persuade teachers that the media are more than simply aids to instruction.

- We need to overcome the notion partly fueled by the recent love affair with computers that technology is neutral or benign

and more specifically

- We need to convince our fellow English teachers that the study of media and production is an important part of the English curriculum.

In this presentation I will summarize some of the developments in curriculum for media study and production in Canada examining the shifts in rationale that led to the present programs and I will examine briefly the most recent rationale which I feel holds some promise in convincing English teachers to make media study and production part of their teaching. I see the evolution of teaching media in Education as evolving through three phases: from an a-v aids phase which was a general secondary school phenomena, through media literacy and language arts phases which came gradually to be identified with instruction in English.

## Phase I The Audio-Visual Aids Phase

In Canada we have had a strong commitment at a provincial and national level to the use of a-v media. Prior to the arrival of television we had already established a radio broadcasting network that has a part of its mandate the production of programs designed to be used in classrooms across the nation. These school broadcasts were jointly sponsored by the Provincial ministries of education and the CBC, covered a range of school subjects and reflected those elements of provincial curricula that were common. In addition, the National Film Board produced films and developed infrastructures to make available to teachers across the country copies of all films they produced. This initial venture begun in the early 1950's has lasted remarkable well. In the late 70¢s and early 80's the NFB was an important developer of and contributor to screen literacy curricula in almost every province in Canada. Unfortunately in recent years a series of budget arts have eaten into this contribution considerably; however the NFB is still an important resource to teachers in media.

The advent of television heralded an imprecedented flurry of activity in the development of a-v aids in education. Nationally, provincially and even locally our leaders embarked on projects to acquire television production and distribution facilities and personnel to produce programs destined for the schools. The early '60's saw the mushrooming of a number of televison enterprises within the public education system. For a while there was considerable interest and enthusiasm. School boards bought televison sets by the hundreds and purchased a mynad of program material. Some boards even acquired facilities including studios, telecine chains and VTR equipment to transfer films and other media presentations to the new medium, and the means to distribute programs.

However, most of these ventures were short lived. The enthusiasm for the use of television as an a-v aid in the classroom declined almost dramatically as it surged. Most teachers returned to traditional approaches to classroom instruction. Many of the enterprises are defunct others have evolved into "public" television agencies such as ACCES; TV Ontario; Radio Quebec, that serve a general public with entertaining and educational programming.

The legacy of the phase was: a continued willingness on the part of educational leaders to recognize and support audio-visual media as being important elements in public education. This willingness manifested itself in a receptiveness to the ideas of those educators who had already moved beyond consideration of media, as audio-visual aids to teachers, to the concept that these media and the messages they conveyed ought to be the flow of study in secondary school. The group of educators who saw television or media literacy as an appropriate field of study for high school students was the second dimension of the legacy of the a-v aids phase.

## Phase II The Visual/Media Literacy Phase

The push for inclusion of media studies as part of secondary school curriculum began to be felt in the 1970's. Most curricular developments centered initially on the study of the influence of television on society. They dealt with such topics as: violence, sexual and racial stereotyping, censorship, future shock, ownership and control, advertising i.e. the topics that were popular in mass media studies courses in colleges and universities in the 1960's.

Following closely from and in some cases simultaneously with these curricular developments came the impetus to design courses and curricula in which students produced their own audio and visual messages. Thomas in a paper titled: "The politics of a critical awareness of media," summarizes a rationale for the growth and development of visual or media literacy curricula in secondary schools.

> A critical appraisal of one's sources of information and those factors which affect one's attitudes and opinions should be integral to everyone's education... We need to know the ways in which the various media - print, video, film, music - are different in terms of their presentation of human experiences in the tools they use and in their impact on us. We must know something about these tools and how they are used to create a certain effect and impact. What are the limitations and possibilities of each of these media? What does each do best? What is each used for?... We must be able to decode the messages and images of what is presented to us... Learning about the media and how our opinions are shaped by it is part of a life-long learning process which may begin with simple questions to young children about the connection between a story book, or television program, and their own experiences. 'Is this the way it is at your house? How is it similar and different?' These questions are appropriate for adolescents and adults, depending on the level of sophistication of discussion. These matters concern everyone, both 'educated' and 'to be educated'. (Thomas, 1981, pp. 9-13.)

Curriculum leaders in provincial ministries of education across Canada responded favourably to such a rationale. Consequently at an official level we see commitments like the following:

> "Generally, then, as stated in the Program of Studies for Senior High Language Arts (1981) the basic purpose of teaching viewing should be to increase the visual literacy of students so that they will become critical and discriminating viewers who are able to enjoy and appreciate the messages they receive."
>
> (Viewing in Secondary Language Arts: Ministry of Education Alberta, 1982, p. 12.)

You will note that the curriculum is titled Language Arts" rather than English. This change in title represents a third phase in the evolution of development of curriculum in media study and production--a phase in which we see this concept of media literacy merging with recent thinking about the teaching of English.

## Phase III The Language Arts Phase

Historically, in most of Canada, teaching media in schools has largely been the responsibility of the English department.

The seemingly most logical reason for this is that the mother tongue (English) is either the principal or secondary code of the messages to be conveyed by the media. (There are other systems of logic regarding the home of media study and production. In Quebec, on the francophone side of the educational system these are located in the fine arts). Within the domain of English, media study and production have had some difficulty in achieving status among English teachers. The lack of status accorded the media existed because of a particular view of English held by most teachers. English is seen as:

1. the study of literature
2. the production of good essays or "compositions".

Both aspects of this view of English are university- (and now CEGEP or College) driven.

At about the beginning of this decade there occurred a shift in thinking about the nature of English teaching in both the elementary and secondary schools. The shift was characterized by an emphasis on language arts. The following excerpt from the Quebec secondary English Language Arts Program describes the thinking that promoted the shift.

> The Secondary English Language Arts program rests on a foundation provided by two conceptions of the uses to which language is put: as a means of coming to terms with ideas and experiences, and as a medium for communicating with others. (English Language Arts, I-V, Quebec, Ministere de l'Education, 1982, p. 11).

Thus, we have curricula being developed in Canada that considers language as a central focus of Education in English and the activities of reading, writing, speaking, listening and viewing as means of aquiring increasing sophistication in expressing one's view of the world to oneself and to others. Such a view of English accords equal status of media study and production to literature study and essay production.

The following table shows the official commitment of each of the ministries of education to the development of media literacy in the context of language arts among its secondary school students.

The information provided represents the criteria usually invoked to determine whether there is serious commitment to a curricular initiative:

1. Is there a public statement of commitment to the initiative?
2. Has a coherent program been developed?
3. Is the program optional or compulsory?
4. Are guides to teachers and adequate teaching and financial resources provided and/or prescirbed?

It can be seen from the survey that official provision has been made for media study and production to flourish in our schools.

In most provinces since 1980 there has been the shift to a language arts view of English curiculum.

In almost all provinces of Canada there is a public statement of commitment to the teaching of media. Only the province of Alberta and Quebec have made media a compulsory component of its Language Arts programs, but in Ontario, and now Saskatchewan the ministeries of education have developed programs that encourage both the study of media and media production. Four provinces have developed or are developing specific resources in the form of teachers guides.

## Teaching of Media in Canada - an overview

| Province | Statement of Commitment | Program Developed | Optional/ Compulsory | Resources Guides/Materials |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| British Columbia | Yes | No | O (S/P) | No |
| Alberta | Yes | Yes (LA) | C (S)<br>O (P) | Yes |
| Saskatchewan | Yes | In development (LA) | C (S)<br>(flexibility re depth) | Yes |
| Manitoba | Yes | No<br>two courses | O (S/P) | No |
| Ontario | Yes | Yes (LA) | O (S/P) | Yes |
| Quebec | Yes | Yes (LA) -A<br>(Fine Arts) -F | C (S/P) -A<br>C (S)<br>O (P) | Yes |
| New Brunswick | N/A | No | O (S/P) | No |
| Nova Scotia | Yes | No | O (S/P) | No |
| PEI | N/A | - | - | - |
| Newfoundland | Yes | No<br>(Instructional technology focus) | O (S/P) | No |

LA - integrated Language Arts Program

S - Study P - Production

A - Anglophone Schools

F - Francophone Schools

Since most programs were developed in the early 1980's, and since some are still under developed it is too soon to tell what impact the official commitments have had on classroom practice. It is apparent thus far that releatively little teaching of media goes on in most English language arts classroom; however I am encouraged by the thrust of new curricula to bring to the attention of the English classroom teacher the importance of media study and production to the development of literate young adults. Given the view of language arts I see emerging in Canada I'm optimistic for the future of teaching media in the schools.

## References

1. Thomas, Barbara. (1981) "The politics of critical awareness of media." in Perspectives on Televison Education. Ottawa, Ontario, Multiculturalism Canada, 1981.

2. Ministry of Education, Alberta. Viewing in Secondary Language Arts, (interim edition) Edmonton, Alberta. Alberta Education, 1982.

3. Ministere de l'education, Quebec. Secondary School Curriculum: English Language Arts, I-V, Quebec; Gouvernement du Quebec, Ministere de l'education, 1982.